

SUPREME COURT OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK
COUNTY OF BRONX

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MARTIN VULAJ,

Plaintiff,

-against-

OUR LADY OF REFUGE ROMAN CATHOLIC
CHURCH, ARCHDIOCESE OF NEW YORK,
JOHN DOE and JANE DOE, RICHARD ROE and
JANE ROE, priests, clergy and administrators whose
names are unknown to the Plaintiff,

Defendants.

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Index No.

Date Purchased:

Plaintiff designates
BRONX

County as the place of trial.


The basis of the venue is
Defendants' place of
business.

SUMMONS

To the above named Defendant(s)

YOU ARE HEREBY SUMMONED to answer the complaint in this action and to
serve a copy of your answer, or, if the complaint is not served with this summons, to serve a
notice of appearance, on the Plaintiff's Attorney within 20 days after the service of this
summons, exclusive of the day of service (or within 30 days after the service is complete if this
summons is not personally delivered to you within the State of New York); and in case of your
failure to appear or answer, judgment will be taken against you by default for the relief
demanded in the complaint.

Dated: New York, New York
October 22, 2019



MICHAEL G. DOWD
600 Third Avenue, 15th Floor
New York, NY 10016
(212) 751-1640

SWEENEY, REICH & BOLZ, LLP
By: Gerard J. Sweeney, Esq.
1981 Marcus Avenue, Suite 200
Lake Success, NY 11042
(718) 459-9000

Attorneys for Plaintiff

SUPREME COURT OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK
COUNTY OF BRONX

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MARTIN VULAJ,

Plaintiff,

Index No.
Date Filed:

-against-

OUR LADY OF REFUGE ROMAN CATHOLIC
CHURCH, ARCHDIOCESE OF NEW YORK,
JOHN DOE and JANE DOE, RICHARD ROE and
JANE ROE, priests, clergy and administrators whose
names are unknown to the Plaintiff,

VERIFIED COMPLAINT

Defendants.

-----X

Plaintiff, Martin Vulaj, by his attorney, MICHAEL G. DOWD, complaining of

Defendants, hereby alleges the following:

JURISDICTION AND VENUE

1. This action is timely commenced pursuant to the New York State Child Victims Act, dated February 14, 2019, and CPLR § 214-g.
2. This Court has jurisdiction pursuant to CPLR § 301 as Defendants' principal place of business is in New York and because much of the unlawful conduct complained of herein occurred in New York.
3. Venue is proper pursuant to CPLR § 503 because Bronx County is where many of the events giving rise to this action occurred.

AS AND FOR A FIRST CAUSE OF ACTION

(NEGLIGENT SUPERVISION)

4. The Plaintiff, Martin Vulaj (hereinafter "Plaintiff") was born on September 19, 1965. He is a resident of Mahopac, New York.

5. Plaintiff is a Roman Catholic and was a parishioner at Defendant OUR LADY OF REFUGE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH (hereinafter “OUR LADY OF REFUGE”), which is a parish within the Defendant ARCHDIOCESE OF NEW YORK. OUR LADY OF REFUGE is located in Bronx, New York, which is in Bronx County.
6. Plaintiff was baptized, confirmed, attended mass, and received his sacraments through the Roman Catholic Church.
7. Upon information and belief, at all times mentioned herein, the ARCHDIOCESE OF NEW YORK (hereinafter “ARCHDIOCESE”) was and is a not-for-profit religious corporation organized and existing around and under by virtue of the laws of the State of New York. Its principal headquarters are located in New York, New York, which is in New York County.
8. Upon information and belief, TIMOTHY CARDINAL DOLAN (hereinafter “DOLAN”) is currently the Roman Catholic Archbishop of the ARCHDIOCESE.
9. Upon information and belief, the Archbishop is the Chief Executive Officer of all parishes and parish schools in the ARCHDIOCESE and as part of said responsibilities assigned the priests to work in the parishes.
10. Upon information and belief all of DOLAN’s predecessor(s) were the Chief Executive Officers of all parishes and parish schools in the ARCHDIOCESE and as part of said responsibilities assigned the priests to work in the parishes, including LAZER SHELDIJA (hereinafter “SHELDIJA”). This includes those Archbishops who assigned SHELDIJA to his parish positions.

11. Upon information and belief, at all times mentioned herein, DOLAN and the above-referenced predecessor Archbishops in the Office of the Archbishop, along with Defendant ARCHDIOCESE, created the policies and procedures to be followed by priests within the ARCHDIOCESE. The Office of the Archbishop and Defendant ARCHDIOCESE were responsible for investigating complaints against its parish clergy. In this capacity, the Office of the Archbishop either directly or through Diocesan officials appointed by them, established policies and procedures by which complaints of sexual abuse against parish clergy, priests, and staff were to be dealt with and investigated by the ARCHDIOCESE.
12. Upon information and belief, at all times mentioned herein, the Office of the Archbishop was also responsible for removing and/or suspending parish clergy and priests from their duties.
13. Upon information and belief, at all times mentioned herein, SHELDIJA was a priest of Defendant OUR LADY OF REFUGE having been assigned and otherwise authorized to work there by the Office of the Archbishop.
14. Upon information and belief, Defendant OUR LADY OF REFUGE is a Roman Catholic parish church within the ARCHDIOCESE.
15. Sometime after Plaintiff became a member of the parish, SHELDIJA began a pattern of grooming Plaintiff for the purpose of sexually abusing him. Plaintiff was an altar server and was so trained in that position by SHELDIJA. The grooming included, but was not limited to, giving Plaintiff special attention and personal Albanian language lessons and training him on how to assist in various parish related religious functions.

16. SHELDIJA's abuse of Plaintiff began in or around 1975 and continued for approximately two years. The abuse included, but was not limited to SHELDIJA having Plaintiff lay in his bed with him while he fondled Plaintiff's stomach, genitals, and masturbated Plaintiff's genitals, SHELDIJA orally copulating Plaintiff, Plaintiff masturbating SHELDIJA's genitals, and SHELDIJA digitally penetrating Plaintiff's anus. The abuse occurred in SHELDIJA's apartment located in Bronx County. Plaintiff estimates the abuse occurred on at least 20 to 30 occasions.
17. Upon information and belief, at all times mentioned herein, Defendant ARCHDIOCESE knew or should have known that children such as Plaintiff were present in parish rectories and priest's apartments for a variety of purposes, including but not limited to, counseling and religious training.
18. Upon information and belief, Plaintiff was taught and otherwise informed by Defendants ARCHDIOCESE and OUR LADY OF REFUGE by word and deed that he should obey, trust, and respect the ARCHDIOCESE and SHELDIJA.
19. Upon information and belief, since at least 1950 through present, Defendants ARCHDIOCESE and OUR LADY OF REFUGE knew the risk of sexual abuse of minor parishioners by priests and other staff working in the ARCHDIOCESE.
20. Upon information and belief, at all times mentioned herein, Defendants ARCHDIOCESE and OUR LADY OF REFUGE knew that minors sexually abused in the Catholic Church would suffer psychological and emotional injuries, as well as other damages.

21. Upon information and belief, at all times mentioned herein, Defendant ARCHDIOCESE aided and abetted the concealment of criminal conduct by failing and refusing to report allegations of child sexual abuse to appropriate New York civil authorities.
22. Upon information and belief, at the time of the acts alleged herein, SHELDIJA was an employee of, and acting as an agent of Defendants ARCHDIOCESE and OUR LADY OF REFUGE.
23. Upon information and belief, Defendants ARCHDIOCESE and OUR LADY OF REFUGE had a duty to protect Plaintiff as a minor parishioner from SHELDIJA's criminal sexual acts.
24. Upon information and belief, Defendants ARCHDIOCESE and OUR LADY OF REFUGE failed to adequately and completely supervise SHELDIJA, and as a result of this failure and negligence, proximately caused Plaintiff to be sexually abused by SHELDIJA.
25. The aforementioned occurrences of sexual abuse were caused by the negligence, carelessness, recklessness, and the willful, wanton, reckless and grossly negligent conduct of Defendants ARCHDIOCESE and OUR LADY OF REFUGE and their agents, servants, and/or employees, in failing to properly and adequately supervise the conduct of SHELDIJA as it related to Plaintiff.
26. By reason of the foregoing, Plaintiff sustained physical and psychological injuries, including but not limited to, severe emotional distress, confusion, humiliation, fright, anxiety, a severe shock to his nervous system, and has been caused to suffer physical pain and mental anguish, emotional and psychological

damages as a result thereof, and, upon information and belief, some or all of these injuries are of a permanent and lasting nature; and that Plaintiff as a result has become and will continue to be obligated to expend sums of money for medical expenses for treatment of said maladies.

27. That by reason of the foregoing, Defendants ARCHDIOCESE and OUR LADY OF REFUGE are also liable to Plaintiff for punitive and exemplary damages.
28. It is hereby alleged pursuant to CPLR 1603 that the foregoing cause of action is exempt from the operation of CPLR 1601 by reason of one or more of the exemptions provided in CPLR 1602, including but not limited to, CPLR 1602(7) and 1602(11).
29. That the amount of damages sought exceeds the jurisdictional limits of all lower courts, which would otherwise have jurisdiction.

AS AND FOR A SECOND CAUSE OF ACTION

(NEGLIGENT FAILURE TO WARN)

30. Plaintiff repeats, reiterates, and realleges each and every allegation contained in the above paragraphs of this Complaint, with the same force and effect as if fully set forth at length herein.
31. Upon information and belief, prior to and at all times herein mentioned, Defendants ARCHDIOCESE and OUR LADY OF REFUGE and their agents, servants, and employees, knew or should have known that SHELDIJA violated ARCHDIOCESE and OUR LADY OF REFUGE's relevant rules, regulations and protocols prohibiting priests like SHELDIJA from sexually abusing and otherwise harming minor parishioners, including Plaintiff.

32. The Defendants ARCHDIOCESE and OUR LADY OF REFUGE and their agents, servants, and employees were negligent, careless and reckless and acted willfully, wantonly and were grossly negligent in failing to warn Plaintiff that the failure of SHELDIJA to abide by ARCHDIOCESE and OUR LADY OF REFUGE's rules, regulations and protocols regarding prohibitions on employees being alone with minor parishioners put Plaintiff at risk for being sexually abused by SHELDIJA.
33. By reason of the foregoing, Plaintiff sustained physical and psychological injuries, including but not limited to, severe emotional distress, confusion, humiliation, fright, anxiety, a severe shock to his nervous system, and has been caused to suffer physical pain and mental anguish, emotional and psychological damages as a result thereof, and, upon information and belief, some or all of these injuries are of a permanent and lasting nature; and that Plaintiff as a result has become and will continue to be obligated to expend sums of money for medical expenses for treatment of said maladies.
34. That by reason of the foregoing, Defendants ARCHDIOCESE and OUR LADY OF REFUGE are also liable to Plaintiff for punitive and exemplary damages.
35. It is hereby alleged pursuant to CPLR 1603 that the foregoing cause of action is exempt from the operation of CPLR 1601 by reason of one or more of the exemptions provided in CPLR 1602, including but not limited to, CPLR 1602(7) and 1602(11).
36. That the amount of damages sought exceeds the jurisdictional limits of all lower courts, which would otherwise have jurisdiction.

AS AND FOR A THIRD CAUSE OF ACTION**(NEGLIGENT FAILURE TO PROVIDE A SAFE AND SECURE ENVIRONMENT)**


37. Plaintiff repeats, reiterates, and realleges each and every allegation contained in the above paragraphs of this Complaint, with the same force and effect as if fully set forth at length herein.
38. The Defendants ARCHDIOCESE and OUR LADY OF REFUGE assumed a duty to protect the safety and welfare of Plaintiff as more fully set forth above, when Plaintiff participated as a parishioner in OUR LADY OF REFUGE related activities such as attending the parish school, confession, and counseling. This duty imposed upon said Defendants, the duty to provide a reasonably safe and secure environment for Plaintiff while he was participating in parish programs.
39. When Plaintiff was in said Defendants' care, said Defendants failed to exercise the degree of care that a reasonably prudent parent would have exercised under similar circumstances.
40. Defendants ARCHDIOCESE and OUR LADY OF REFUGE and their agents and employees were negligent, careless and reckless and acted willfully, wantonly and were grossly negligent in failing to provide a safe and secure environment for Plaintiff while he participated as a minor in parish programs and as such was sexually abused by SHELDIJA.
41. By reason of the foregoing, Plaintiff sustained physical and psychological injuries, including but not limited to, severe emotional distress, confusion, humiliation, fright, anxiety, a severe shock to his nervous system, and has been caused to suffer physical pain and mental anguish, emotional and psychological

damages as a result thereof, and, upon information and belief, some or all of these injuries are of a permanent and lasting nature; and that Plaintiff as a result has become and will continue to be obligated to expend sums of money for medical expenses for treatment of said maladies.

42. That by reason of the foregoing, Defendants ARCHDIOCESE and OUR LADY OF REFUGE are also liable to Plaintiff for punitive and exemplary damages.
43. It is hereby alleged pursuant to CPLR 1603 that the foregoing cause of action is exempt from the operation of CPLR 1601 by reason of one or more of the exemptions provided in CPLR 1602, including but not limited to, CPLR 1602(7) and 1602(11).
44. That the amount of damages sought exceeds the jurisdictional limits of all lower courts, which would otherwise have jurisdiction.

WHEREFORE, the Plaintiff demands judgment against the Defendants, together with compensatory and punitive damages, and the interest, costs and disbursements pursuant to the causes of action herein.

Dated: New York, New York
October 22, 2019



MICHAEL G. DOWD
600 Third Avenue, 15th Floor
New York, NY 10016
(212) 751-1640

SWEENEY, REICH & BOLZ, LLP
By: Gerard J. Sweeney, Esq.
1981 Marcus Avenue, Suite 200
Lake Success, NY 11042
(718) 459-9000

Attorneys for Plaintiff

VERIFICATION BY ATTORNEY

MICHAEL G. DOWD, an attorney being duly admitted before the courts of the State of New York, hereby affirms the following under penalties of perjury:

That he is an attorney for the Plaintiff in the above-entitled action with offices located at 600 Third Ave, New York, New York; that he has read the foregoing VERIFIED COMPLAINT and knows the contents thereof; that the same is true to his knowledge, except as to the matters stated to be alleged upon information and belief, and that as to those matters he believes them to be true.

That the reason why this verification is made by deponent instead of Plaintiff is because Plaintiff is not within the County of New York where deponent has his office. Deponent further says that the grounds of his belief as to all matters in the VERIFIED COMPLAINT not stated to be upon his knowledge are based upon conversations with the Plaintiff and other writings relevant to this action.

Dated: New York, New York
October 22, 2019



MICHAEL G. DOWD
Attorney for Plaintiff
600 Third Avenue, 15th Floor
New York, NY 10016
(212) 751-1640